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RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2238
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5702
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000543

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: SENATOR WEBB'S MEETING WITH NATIONAL
LEAGUE FOR DEMOCRACY LEADERS

REF: RANGOON 527

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Classified By: P/E Chief Jennifer Harhigh for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

11. (C) During a private 30-minute meeting August 15 in Nay Pyi Taw, National League for Democracy (NLD) Central Executive Committee members (aka the Uncles) Nyunt Wai, Than Tun and Soe Myint told Senator Webb they view sanctions as a political, not economic, weapon designed to pressure the regime. Senator Webb countered with his perspective that sanctions have geostrategic implications and can hinder people-to-people contact. The Uncles emphasized their interest in dialogue with the regime and noted a perceived shift in Than Shwe's thinking; they are hopeful he may be prepared to talk. Senator Webb stressed that despite his interest in looking for a "new road" to improve bilateral relations, U.S. policy principles -- support for release of political prisoners, including ASSK, and respect for human rights -- will remain constant. He told the Uncles he had asked the Prime Minister, and planned to ask Than Shwe, for ASSK's release. NLD leaders rejected Senator Webb's suggestion that Vietnam is a good model for Burma, stressing they want more political change in Burma than has occurred in Vietnam, a one-party state. End summary.

NLD: Sanctions are a Political, not Economic Weapon

12. (C) Senator Webb met with NLD leaders following a disorganized and non-substantive group session with registered political parties, arranged by the GOB. NLD Central Executive Committee (CEC) member Nyunt Wai opened the private meeting with the Senator by stating the NLD, like the U.S., espouses liberal democracy. The U.S., through sanctions, is trying to promote democracy in Burma. Thus far, there has been no improvement, he said, so why should there be a change in sanctions policy? In response, Senator Webb asked the NLD's position on sanctions, noting the party represents the conscience of Burma. Nyunt Wai replied that the NLD did not ask for sanctions. Rather, international

actors had imposed them to improve democracy. Sanctions should be seen as a political weapon, not as an economic or commercial matter. He added that Burma's economic problems are the result of bad governance, not sanctions.

13. (C) Senator Webb discussed the trade embargo on Vietnam, noting that it had not worked. Similarly, he observed, sanctions have not worked in Burma. They had only increased China's economic position and made it difficult for Burmese to connect with people from countries with more liberal governments. He had visited Burma in 2001 with a friend who had been forced to close down his business in Burma due to sanctions. The Senator said he is looking for a new formula.

Focus on Politics, ASSK's Release

14. (C) Turning to Burma's political situation, Than Tun argued that political, not economic, issues are at the root of Burma's problems. The country had elections in 1990; the regime did not uphold the results. There is no respect for human rights. He emphasized that the NLD wants dialogue leading to reconciliation and democracy. Elections without dialogue will not fix the country's problems. Senator Webb assured the NLD leaders U.S. policy will always emphasize the importance of respect for human rights.

15. (C) Soe Myint added that despite the regime's promise of elections, it has not issued any laws. UN SYG Ban and the international community had called for the release of ASSK and other political prisoners, but they are still detained. Senator Webb responded that he had asked the Prime Minister the previous day, and would ask Than Shwe, to release ASSK.

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The Senator said he wanted to move the relationship in a new direction, but would always uphold the basic principles of USG policy.

16. (C) Than Tun asked the Senator to tell Than Shwe to release ASSK if he is serious about democracy. The NLD will hold no grudges and believes compromise with Than Shwe is possible. Nyunt Wai observed that Than Shwe's attitude seems to have changed. He commuted ASSK's sentence and implied he may be ready for dialogue. Than Tun added that the NLD recognizes that Than Shwe "recently moved a little to the democratic side" and attributed the change to international pressure on the regime. (Note: Per Reftel, CEC members echoed these sentiments in an August 12 meeting with DCM. End note.)

17. (C) Nyunt Wai added that ASSK is a political institution and must be seen and heard by the people. He inquired whether sanctions relief will be tied to ASSK's freedom; asking what the U.S. would expect in exchange for lifting sanctions. Senator Webb replied the U.S. needs a "careful new road." U.S. principles include ASSK's release. There are also concerns about economic policy, particularly the rise of China. The Senator said he has spent 18 years working on Vietnam to craft a "new road" by building bridges between Vietnam and the U.S.-based Vietnamese community. Lifting the trade embargo in 1994 has helped.

NLD: We Don't Want to be Like Vietnam

18. (C) Nyunt Wai responded that the Vietnamese communists are still in power; if the same road is followed in Burma, the regime will still be in place in 25 years. Senator Webb allowed that Vietnam is not a democracy but said there has been improvement. Than Tun reiterated the NLD's desire for a political settlement with the regime, including ASSK's release and dialogue leading to a democratic system. Nyunt Wai added that a constitutional review is necessary before elections. Senator Webb concluded the meeting, expressing

hope for NLD-regime dialogue and noting that if the process can work, Burma could one day be in a better situation than Vietnam.

19. (SBU) Codel Webb declined the opportunity to clear on this message.

VAJDA